

## 05 December 2021—The Second Sunday of Advent: Philippians 1:3-11 (Year C)

In the reading from Philippians, proclaimed to us a moment ago, Paul gives us a picture of how we are to live as we await the return of Jesus. Paul writes, *And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight, to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.* (v.9-11).

Paul's prayer for the Church begins with a petition for overflowing love. Think of a cup filled to the brim and more, the contents spilling out all around. We are to be that cup filled with God's love and grace, God's life bursting forth, rushing out from us in a torrent. Paul is surely thinking of imagery Jesus himself used. People would ask him in various ways, "How can I be more righteous, more holy than I obviously already am?" Jesus always challenged people to leave behind all measurements of spiritual and moral attainment. To one, Jesus said, 'give away your possessions and follow me;' to another: 'don't forgive seven times, but so many times you lose track;' to yet another, 'Don't just love your friends, but strangers, even your enemies.'

This kind of boundless, overflowing life is possible because such love is of God. Our love is limited, provisional, dependent. God's love is eternal, infinite, transforming. The German theologian and martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote that when we say, "God is love", we usually put the emphasis on the wrong word; we assume 'love' tells us something about God. It is the other way around: God gives meaning to the word love, for God is the source, means, and perfecter of love. All love is born of God and, to varying degrees, participates in and reflects God's love. Paul's prayer is that we consciously, intentionally live in God's love, becoming filled and overflowing with God's love, for our transformation and the conversion of others into God's love.

The fruit of God's love is *knowledge and full insight, to help (us) determine what is best.* Here is the test for every Christian and Christian congregation: are we growing in love, in awareness, and in discernment? Our purpose is to *determine what is best*, and thereby become *pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness.* This is a familiar concept to us. Do we not every Sunday ask God's forgiveness and the power of the Holy Spirit to amend our lives that we may "delight in (God's) will and walk in (God's) ways"? Our corporate confession testifies that reconciliation is not just about the past and present, but projects us into a future of amended life in service to God and others. Whatever does not involve God's overflowing love offered extravagantly, whatever does not involve hospitality to all, whatever does not contribute to the transformation of one's own and others' lives to God, is a waste of time. Today is too precious to squander, the Gospel too valuable for lethargy.

We are to be a *harvest of righteousness.* Paul means what he calls elsewhere the 'fruit of the Spirit': *love, joy, peace; patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, generosity, self-control* (Galatians 5:22-23). Being 'righteous' is not a moral code or fastidiousness with right behavior. Righteousness is willing what God's wills for oneself and all others—to be converted, transformed, and resurrected into signs of God's faithful love to all.

In Advent we are a people in waiting. We wait and prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus, his first advent. We await Jesus' Second Advent. Paul gives us the way of Christian waiting: it is active, not docile; it is born in and witnesses to God's love in Christ for all. There is work to be done, prayers and worship to offer, friendship given, reconciliation nurtured, God's love recklessly shared from lives awash with God's love. We wait—actively, expectantly, with hope. We continually surrender ourselves so Jesus will have his way with us, to empty out all that separates us and others from him, to be brimming with the Holy Spirit, with Christ's life and love. We are to burst with God's loving-kind goodness for everyone. We are all ministers of the Good News of God in Jesus Christ, transforming us and the world into the image of the only begotten, through whom and for whom all things were made, and in whom all things will be brought to perfection.

Blessing and honor, thanksgiving and praise, more than we can offer, more than we can conceive, be yours, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, by all angels, all mortals, all creatures, now and for ever. Amen.